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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 96

By Williams

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Dale Earnhardt.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the death of famed stock car racing legend, Dale Earnhardt; and

WHEREAS, Dale Earnhardt was a consummate professional who employed the lessons learned from a rural upbringing to ascend to the pinnacle of his sport; his success serves as a shining example of the vast potential that resides within every person; and

WHEREAS, reared on a farm in Kannapolis, North Carolina, Dale Earnhardt developed a love of racing at an early age; his father, Ralph Earnhardt, won the 1956 NASCAR Sportsman Championship and made 51 Winston Cup starts before his death in 1973; and

WHEREAS, after competing in local races near his hometown, Mr. Earnhardt entered his first Winston Cup race, the World 600, on May 25, 1975; in the next three years, he competed in eight races, honing the skills that would make him a legend in the years to come; and

WHEREAS, in 1979, Dale Earnhardt burst onto the NASCAR stage in his first full season finishing among the top five competitors in eleven of twenty-seven races, including his first victory at the Southeastern 500 at Bristol Motor Speedway in just his 16<sup>th</sup> start; and

WHEREAS, Dale Earnhardt concluded the 1979 season in seventh place in the Winston Cup standings; and for his remarkable accomplishments, he was honored as the Winston Cup Rookie of the Year; and

WHEREAS, in his second season, Dale Earnhardt won five races and finished among the top five drivers in fourteen others; he became the Winston Cup champion as the season's top driver, and was the first driver in history to win stock car racing's highest honor in the season following a campaign in which he was named Rookie of the Year; and

WHEREAS, Dale Earnhardt added six additional championships to his remarkable accomplishments; in winning the 1987 championship, he dominated the Winston Cup circuit by winning eleven times and finishing among the top five in an astonishing twenty-one of twenty-nine races; and

WHEREAS, displaying remarkable consistency during his twenty-two full seasons, Dale Earnhardt finished among the top ten drivers in the Winston Cup points standings twenty times, including three instances as runner-up and fourteen among the top five drivers; and

WHEREAS, in 1998, Dale Earnhardt completed his racing résumé by winning the Super Bowl of NASCAR, the Daytona 500; and

WHEREAS, during his final complete season of 2000, Mr. Earnhardt quelled any doubts that he was still a premier driver by finishing second in the points standings; the season was highlighted by a thrilling victory at the Talladega Superspeedway; and

WHEREAS, among countless other remarkable accomplishments, Dale Earnhardt was the first three-time Winston Select champion, a three-time IROC champion, and American Driver of the Year in 1987 and 1994; he also holds records for most victories at Talladega Superspeedway with ten and at Daytona Speedway with thirty-four; and

WHEREAS, this legendary driver's name fills the NASCAR record book, as he holds Winston Cup records for earnings, consecutive races, top-ten points finishes, consecutive years with a victory, and Winston Cup Championships, a record that he shares with fellow legend Richard Petty; and

WHEREAS, in reaching his exalted position in motor sports, Dale Earnhardt earned the respect of racing peers and fans alike for his competitive spirit, stalwart determination, and extraordinary skill; he became known as "the Intimidator", a nickname which was used by some in awe, by others in competitive contempt, but by all with the utmost respect; and

WHEREAS, "the Intimidator" utilized an aggressive style that has come to define a generation of drivers who run hard on race day then shake hands and exchange congratulations when the race is over; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Earnhardt earned the admiration of an immense throng of fans, who loved him not so much for his incredible success but for the way in which he was a reflection of the common man; he never lost sight of his rural roots, and he was an inspiration to all; and

WHEREAS, among the NASCAR community, Dale Earnhardt was considered to be the best that his sport ever produced; NASCAR chairman Bill France called him the sport's "greatest driver," while former driver and current broadcaster Ned Jarrett said "He could do things with a race car that no one else could"; and

WHEREAS, according to close friend and long-time racing associate Richard Childress, "Dale Earnhardt was much more than a race car driver. He was a very loving husband and a proud father and grandfather. He was a successful businessman. He was also a hero to millions of fans throughout the world. Dale was my friend... I will miss him always. He was the greatest"; and

WHEREAS, Dale Earnhardt's pale blue-eyed stare could daunt anyone on a race track, but those same eyes often shone with a playful gleam when he was in the company of his beloved friends and family; and

WHEREAS, deeply devoted to family values of the highest order, Dale Earnhardt enjoyed the loving companionship of his wife, Teresa, and was the proud parent of two sons, Dale, Jr. and Kerry, and two daughters, Kelly and Taylor; and

WHEREAS, as Dale Earnhardt followed his father's example, his children have inherited the Earnhardt love of racing; Dale Earnhardt, Sr. joined his father among the 50 Greatest Drivers in NASCAR as honored in 1998, and Dale Earnhardt, Jr. followed in his father's footsteps as a Winston Cup driver in 2000; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Earnhardt leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, the essence of the Earnhardt legacy was most aptly encapsulated by renowned driver Tony Stewart, who said, "Dale Earnhardt made a difference in the world. On the track, he made us all better drivers, because he set a standard of excellence we all aspired to achieve. He had a passion and a desire that took the sport of NASCAR to a new level every time he climbed in the car. Off the track, he was a kind, giving, loving man who gave his all to his family and friends. He worked tirelessly to make the world a better place for as many people as possible who were less fortunate than he; and I did not know him as long as most of the other drivers, but he made a huge impact on my life in the years I have been in NASCAR. I am grateful and blessed to have had the benefit of his wisdom and guidance"; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, That we honor the memory of Dale Earnhardt, reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction as a NASCAR champion and tremendous example to the people of Tennessee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Mr. Earnhardt.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.